



M O V I N G T H E
AMERICAN
ECONOMY

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
www.dot.gov/affairs/briefing.htm

News

FTA 02-08
Date: March 10, 2008

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10 Transit Agencies Recognized by FTA for Creatively Boosting Ridership

Public transportation providers who were innovative in finding ways to increase their ridership figures were recognized this week by the nation's top federal transit official. The initiatives ranged from partnering with local university students to reduce crime, to sponsoring radio jingles, to advertising in local hotels and restaurants.

The "Success in Enhancing Ridership Award" was presented to the 10 winners today by Administrator James S. Simpson, of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The award recognizes initiatives by transit agencies that result in significant increases of at least five percent more passengers per year over a two year period.

"These transit agencies have shown that being customer-focused is the key to success in any business," Simpson said. "Each transit provider identified the specific needs in the community and created a plan that resonated beyond your typical advertising campaign."

The awards recognized transit providers who tried fresh approaches to boost their ridership between the years of 2005 and 2006. The two-year period allowed enough time to put the new strategies into practice and then measure their results. In addition to netting more passengers, the new techniques must also have the potential to be successfully implemented by other transit systems.

The FTA selected the winners from 26 transit providers who submitted applications. Winners were divided into four population categories ranging from under 50,000 to more than a million people.

"Our winners have set a great example for others to follow," Simpson said. "Hopefully they inspire others to find creative ways to boost ridership in their communities as well."

Simpson presented the awards at the American Public Transportation Association's annual legislative conference in Washington, D.C.

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2008 FTA Ridership Award Winners

Under 50,000 in population

City of Macomb-Go West Transit, Macomb, Illinois

By revising their fare structure, advertising, and partnering with Western Illinois University, Go West was able to increase their ridership by 22 percent. After their weekend late night service started having incidents, Go West partnered with the University and trained law enforcement students as transit security officers which practically eliminated incidents on the weekend night runs.

Pulaski Area Transit, Pulaski, Virginia

Pulaski is a small community just off I-81 in the southwestern part of Virginia. PAT switched from a deviated-route bus service to a demand-response service and increased ridership by 25 percent. Their fares are really low, at \$0.75 per trip or \$2.00 for a special trip from your home to a specific location. PAT raised funds by operating an annual golf tournament and has arranged for Wal-Mart to pay for their Saturday service around town.

50,000 to 200,000 in population

Monroe Transit System, Monroe, Louisiana

In July 2005, Monroe Transit, in North Louisiana, implemented a day pass and added new night service. Afterwards, they paid a local radio station \$200 to create a jingle which began running as a free public service spot. They had their bus graphics professionally redesigned for free by the local university art department. This all added up to a 12 percent increase in ridership and a much more exciting image for transit in Monroe.

University of New Hampshire-Wildcat Transit, Durham, New Hampshire

Wildcat Transit used better traveler information, nicer bus shelters (with solar power lighting), and new biodiesel transit buses to increase their ridership by 21 percent. The University instituted a website with regularly updated transit and parking information, which is a boon to ridership during special events when parking is scarce. Students love the environmentally friendly vehicles and shelters. The University's Office of Sustainability promoted the biodiesel buses with a month-long campaign that included a press event attended by the Governor.

River Valley Metro Mass Transit, Bourbonnais, Illinois

River Valley Metro reported a 23 percent increase in ridership and was presented the 2002 Outstanding Achievement Award from the American Public Transportation Association. They have achieved this honor by working to identify what services the community needs and by letting their community know what services they provide. They instituted a summer pass program that allows students free rides on any bus in the system for the entire summer. Free passes were distributed throughout the schools and were available from any bus driver. They also extended service hours to 10:30 at night for people who work late or take evening classes at the community college.

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200,000 to 1 million in population

Sun Tran, City of Tucson, Arizona

Sun Tran runs more than 150 buses serving the City of Tucson and portions of Pima County. By acquiring 38 new biodiesel low-floor replacement buses and responding to problem areas identified by customer perception research, Sun Tran was able to grow ridership by 7 percent. A survey identified driver friendliness and on-time arrivals as being high in customer importance and low in customer perception. This led Sun Tran to focus its efforts on these areas with a series of *Transit Ambassador* training sessions and an in-house campaign targeting the importance of on-time performance.

Denton County Transportation Authority, Denton, Texas

By partnering with the University of North Texas on several mutually beneficial initiatives, DCTA increased its ridership by 17 percent. Their Commuter Express service now offers free service on campus which improves access to the University and gives the Authority a passenger base for reverse commute trips from Dallas. By the end of the year, 35-40 percent of Commuter Express riders were associated with the University. DCTA also expanded its university shuttle service.

Spokane Transit Authority, Spokane, Washington

The Spokane Transit Authority re-did their marketing identity, partnered with special events in the community, and adapted their routes to meet the needs of different service areas. These measures increased their ridership by 9 percent. New services were introduced to support medical facilities, universities, and major employment centers. Unproductive neighborhood routes were reduced or eliminated. Service frequency was tailored to the individual work schedules of local employers and the needs of the local colleges and universities.

Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Fort Worth, Texas

“The T” developed a campaign to target “choice” commuters with a strong cost-saving message to use public transportation as an alternative to their personal vehicle due to high gasoline prices. An advertising campaign was created to include a series of humorous print ads and direct mail pieces with a free day pass coupon to induce trial ridership. “The T” targeted schools and college students; all Fort Worth ninth graders (who are too young to drive) received a free annual freshman pass. Texas Christian University students, faculty, and staff all received free annual transit passes. Ridership is up by 9 percent.

Over 1 million in population

Delaware Transit Corporation, Dover, Delaware

By advertising bus and train transit services in restrooms at over 80 restaurants and hotels throughout the State, Delaware Transit has increased their ridership by 7 percent (22 percent for their intercounty motorcoach service and 12 percent for rail).

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